

# WHITE SEABASS

## Management

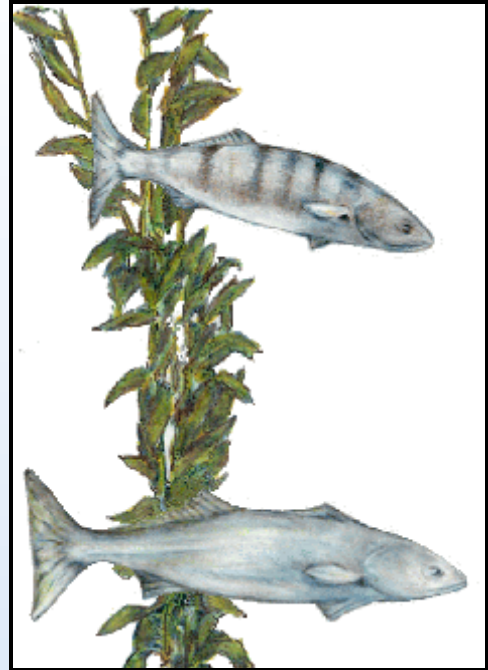
The California Fish and Game Commission adopted an initial White Seabass Fishery Management Plan (WSFMP) in 1996. However, regulations to implement the management plan were not adopted at the time. In 1998, California enacted the Marine Life Management Act (MLMA), granting broader regulatory authority to the Fish and Game Commission, and declaring that the WSFMP will remain in effect until amended and brought into compliance with the MLMA on or before January 1, 2002. A draft of the new WSFMP has been completed, and was presented to the Fish and Game Commission on August 4, 2001. The draft WSFMP uses a framework approach to management of the white seabass resource, providing for the adjustment of management measures without the need for a plan amendment. This allows for a more timely and adaptive response to the changing management needs of the fishery. Changes made in the draft WSFMP include a preferred management option that would establish a total annual harvest guideline of 1.3 million pounds of fish. This level of harvest is expected to promote continued growth of the white seabass stock off California without impacting the recreational and commercial components of the fishery, since current and expected future harvest levels are below the proposed harvest guideline.

## Public Participation

Public input is a critical component of marine resource management. Interested individuals are encouraged to be involved in the Department of Fish and Game's management of white seabass. You can become involved by writing the Fish and Game Commission or the Department of Fish and Game to express your views or request additional information. In addition, the public can contribute to white seabass recovery through conscientious angling and boating.

### How anglers can help protect the resource

- ! Due to the fragile nature of white seabass, do not practice catch and release.
- ! Use barbless or circle hooks.



- ! Use a knotless mesh landing net to land white seabass. Return short fish to the water as soon as possible.
- ! If a fish is hooked in the gullet (throat area), cut the line close to the hook and release the fish.
- ! Protect white seabass habitat by avoiding the use of garden pesticides and other toxins that can be washed down storm drains. Boaters should avoid discharging petroleum-based wastes, such as motor oil, from vessels.

## Fishery

White seabass are large, highly prized fish that are important to both the recreational and commercial fisheries of California. The white seabass resource has been shared by recreational and commercial fishermen since the late 1890's. During the 1950's, recreational and commercial fishing for seabass in California occurred primarily along the coast between San Diego and San Pedro, and off Santa Catalina Island. Since that time, the fishery has expanded north to Point Conception and out to the Channel Islands and offshore areas. Some fishing activity also takes place north of Point Conception. The commercial

fishery has largely been comprised of a small group of fishermen who target white seabass using set and drift gill nets as well as hook and line gear. Commercial landings were in decline between 1959 and 1987, but have been increasing since. The recreational fishery is composed of hook and line anglers as well as spear fishermen. Most white seabass in the recreational fishery are landed from private boats or Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessels (party boats). Landings in the recreational fishery have dramatically increased in recent years.

## Life History

White seabass are the largest members of the croaker family in California. Fish weighing close to ninety pounds and up to five feet have been recorded, though fish over sixty pounds are rare. They range over the continental shelf of the eastern north Pacific from Juneau, Alaska to Magdalena Bay, Baja California, and inhabit the northern portion of the Gulf of California, Mexico.

White seabass off California occur primarily between San Diego and Point Conception. White seabass become sexually mature at about three years old. Spawning in southern California occurs from April through August, peaking in May and June. During this period, mature white seabass appear to congregate near shore, over rocky habitat and near kelp beds. Females are believed to spawn several times in a season. White seabass eggs are buoyant, and drift with the ocean currents. The eggs develop into darkly colored larvae, and settle out into coastal areas, where young-of-the-year are found with drifting debris and algae in shallow areas just outside the surf zone. Older juveniles can be found in kelp beds and in protected bays, where they are often associated with eelgrass beds. As white seabass mature, they are more commonly found schooling over or near rocky bottoms and around kelp beds along the coast and offshore islands. Adults are also known to school several miles offshore.

### Key Facts on the White Seabass *Atractoscion nobilis*

<b>Family</b>	<b>Sciaenidae (croaker family)</b>
<b>Other Names</b>	<b>king croaker, weakfish, seatrout (juveniles)</b>
<b>Identification</b>	<b>Bluish grey above with dark speckling, silvery below; young have several dark vertical bars. Distinguishable from other croakers by a ridge running along the belly.</b>
<b>Range</b>	<b>Magdalena Bay, Baja California to Juneau, Alaska and the northern end of the Gulf of California.</b>
<b>Habitat</b>	<b>Juveniles are found in protected bays and in kelp beds. Adults occur over or near rocky bottoms and around kelp beds along the coast and offshore islands.</b>
<b>Prey</b>	<b>White seabass prey on market squid, Pacific sardine, northern anchovy, and pelagic red crab.</b>
<b>Diving Record</b>	<b>80 lb 0 oz (1994)</b>
<b>Angling Record</b>	<b>77 lbs 4 oz (1950)</b>
<b>Fishery</b>	<b>Fishing activity is centered in southern California. The recreational fishery consists of hook and line angling as well as spearfishing. White seabass are taken commercially by gill net as well as by hook and line.</b>